

**H. P. LIDDON  
& THE PRIESTLY IDEAL**



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## H. P. Liddon and the priestly ideal.

Even to those familiar with Nineteenth Century Tractarian matters the name of Henry Parry Liddon is likely to mean only one thing – the four volume biography of Dr Pusey. It was a monument of painstaking research, and its quality is shown by the fact that more than a century since its first appearance it remains indispensable as the chief published source on its subject. More recent reflection may have revealed shortcomings in it, but those have to be seen against the scope of the work. In conversation with me, the present Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged the scale of Liddon's achievement when he remarked that it would be almost impossible today for one person to undertake a new biography of Dr Pusey and to cover the many aspects of his life in the way which Liddon did.

Yet to Liddon's contemporaries that massive biography was the last achievement in a life already notable. Indeed, some of his friends considered it regrettable that he devoted so much effort to it, feeling that the Herculean labour involved was harming him physically and psychologically. Bishop Edward King of Lincoln begged Liddon to set the task aside and so free himself for work more fitted to his personal gifts.<sup>1</sup> Of those, the one most familiar to Victorian Churchmen was his skill in oratory which made him the foremost preacher in the Church of England after the defection of Newman. When Liddon, as a Residentiary Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, preached in that building he was guaranteed to pack the pews. For much of his time at St Paul's he combined his work as a Canon with the post of Dean Ireland Professor of biblical exegesis at Oxford, where during term he lived at Christ Church only a few yards away from Pusey. Although he resigned his professorship to write Pusey's life, the combined roles of biographer, preacher and canon created a burden whose weight would have been punishing for a man in better general health than Liddon. Yet to this burden he added the work of a controversialist ready to take part in many of the struggles which convulsed the late Victorian Church, and especially those which concerned the upholding of Catholic teaching and practice in the Church of England. Nor must we overlook his care for students and for the many people who wrote to him. His daily output of letters was in itself large. And last, but not least, we should add that he was a sociable man whose amusing and occasionally sharp comments were the guarantee of entertainment at many dinner tables. Small wonder that his diary becomes a record of increasingly poor health, and that he died at the early age of sixty-one.

However, underlying all that Liddon did there was a constant feature which I wish to examine, and that was his concern for the life and work of the priest. Whatever else he did, his sense of priestly vocation and the duties which it imposed on him were central to his life and his work, and he was deeply concerned that the priests of the Church of England should have a devotion and a commitment to their vocation that went far beyond the merely formal. Indeed, his first significant job was the training of men for the priesthood. In 1854 he was appointed by the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, to be Vice-Principal of Wilberforce's new theological college at Cuddesdon, a position he held for four years. They were difficult times for such a brave experiment as Wilberforce's college. I do not propose to tell that story in detail, because it has recently been done in a collection of essays on the history of the college.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to say that following Newman's departure to Rome in 1845 there were many voices heard loudly condemning anything Tractarian, and everything supposed to smack of "Romanism". Pusey was a prime target, and Liddon's known connection with Pusey made him an object of suspicion. Complaints were made to Wilberforce about the services in the college chapel which were thought likely to lead men Rome-ward, and the fears were confirmed when some Cuddesdon men did convert. Among them was F. C. Burnand, later editor of *Punch*. With that anti-Anglican spitefulness which marks a certain type of Roman convert, Burnand later wrote a piece of fiction drawing an unkind picture of Cuddesdon College. The Vice-Principal in the story, Mr D'Oyley Glyde, is unmistakably Liddon.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Barry A. Orford: "A Letter to Liddon", *CR Quarterly*, St John the Baptist, 1989. I have since seen a typed copy of the letter which Liddon wrote in reply to King's comments.

<sup>2</sup> Mark D. Chapman (Ed.): *Ambassadors for Christ* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> F. C. Burnand: "My Time, and what I've done with it," *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. XXIX, 1874.

The accusations of Romanism must have been particularly wounding to Liddon, since he always set himself sternly to prevent unsettled people from converting. At Pusey House there are a number of Romish convictions; and let it not be forgotten that in 1852, just before his ordination, Liddon made a visit to Rome where he met Monsignor George Talbot who made strenuous but unsuccessful attempts to convert him. Even a private audience with Pope Pius IX could not shift Liddon's lack of conviction about the claims of Rome, and he was not a man to be swayed by emotion in such a case.<sup>4</sup> However, where Cuddesdon was concerned that strength of character proved his undoing. The accusations made against him and against the college might be grossly unjust, but they were being made in an overheated atmosphere. A wiser man would have quietly made the necessary concessions to achieve peace, and waited for more favourable times in which to restore to the chapel the things objected to. But there was always a streak of inflexibility in Liddon which made him unyielding on what he believed to be fundamental principles. In the end it became clear to Wilberforce that for the survival of the college Liddon must step down.

What, then, was the vision of priesthood which animated Liddon, and what did he believe was the formation procedure best likely to achieve that vision?

It may appear surprising that Liddon, who was indisputably one of the most learned and capable theologians in the Church of England in the late Nineteenth Century, never devoted himself to a sustained consideration of the nature of priesthood. That task was left to R. C. Moberly in his book *Ministerial Priesthood* (1897). Yet perhaps we should not be surprised. For all his great theological knowledge, Liddon was not an original thinker. Indeed it seems that he went to some trouble *not* to be original. He believed that it was his task to state the Church's historic dogmatic truths to his time and not to be speculative. It might have been a worthy aim, but when it was allied with his deeply conservative and logical cast of mind it resulted in a failure to see that Christian dogmas sometimes have to be reformulated in order to speak to new circumstances. The consequence is well expressed in a saying that if Liberals like Benjamin Jowett were offering to the rising generation a Christianity not worth believing, conservatives like Liddon could offer only a Christianity impossible to believe.<sup>5</sup> To the central doctrines of the Faith, however, Liddon restricted himself, notably in his famous 1866 Bampton Lectures on the divinity of Christ. He did not tackle to any pronounced degree questions of sacramental theology, including ordination. Furthermore, it must be remembered that Liddon's published writings were almost always "occasional", usually sermons.

We look in vain, then for a technical theological examination by Liddon of the nature of priesthood. Concerning the living of the priestly life, however, we are more fortunate. In 1856 and 1857 he departed from his usual practice and published, in two instalments, one of his rare essays, under the title, "The Priest in his Inner Life".<sup>6</sup> This gives us some insight into his ideal of priesthood, though it should be remembered that it is the work of a young man just two years into his experience of forming priests at Cuddesdon.

The immediately significant thing about this essay is its title. Liddon was clear that what determines the ministry of the priest is the quality of his *inner* life. As he says at the start, many books address themselves to the external duties of the Christian priest. He acknowledges that these books "continually insist upon the necessity of bringing the inward life to bear upon the discharge of such outward ministries," but their shortcoming is that "the existence of an inward life is indeed assumed, but no attempt is made to determine its specific character, or the laws of its formation."<sup>7</sup> Here a note is struck which Liddon was to sound ever after, and it requires a word of explanation.

Broadly stated, until the nineteenth century, preparation for ordination meant attending the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. As Owen Chadwick has put it,

The bishops assumed that a candidate with a university education was adequately prepared for ordination....The young man could not take a degree at either university without professing himself a member of the Church of England. While he lived at the university he was expected and compelled to attend the services in chapel. The head of his college was normally in orders; so were many of the fellows.<sup>8</sup>

From the early 1800's the adequacy of this background for ordination preparation was coming into question. In 1832 Dr Pusey published his *Remarks on the Prospective and Past Benefits of Cathedral Institutions in the Promotion of Sound Religious Knowledge*, in which he suggested that cathedrals should be centres for learning and clerical education.<sup>9</sup> In the years following theological colleges were established in a number of cathedral cities.<sup>10</sup> The acts of Parliament in 1854 and 1856, which opened up the lower degrees of Oxford and Cambridge to men irrespective of religious affiliation, changed the existing situation for ever. It was no accident that Cuddesdon was founded in 1854.

It is interesting and sometimes depressing to see how little the lines of Liddon's thought changed over the years. On the unsuitability of the universities for priestly preparation he was firm from the start. In the essay I have mentioned, referring to the ideals of purity and prayer as basic for priestly life, he writes,

...it cannot, unfortunately, be assumed by any one who has an intimate knowledge of the moral statistics of our Universities, that a majority of those who yearly leave these seats of learning to devote themselves to the service of the altar will have retained the one grace [purity], or formed habits moderately proportioned to the moral and intellectual development of the other [prayer].<sup>11</sup>

The result is disastrous when (as he puts it), "men with closed hearts, and scanty insight into truth, and palsied wills" find themselves having to speak for God and deal with sinners in a parish.<sup>12</sup>

That point about the moral failure of the universities as sources for priesthood was important to him. In a sermon on "The Moral Groundwork of Clerical Training" delivered at Cuddesdon in 1873 he returned to the issue. "The only safe basis in the human mind for the highest truths of faith – for the truths which satisfy and sustain the life of religion in the soul – must be a moral basis", he said. The universities assumed that "the same qualities that make a man a good student or teacher of physical science will make him a good student of theological science." The answer to that error is that "religious truth addresses itself, not merely or chiefly to intellect, but to the moral sense," and "dogmatic wisdom has its root and beginning in the culture of those moral and spiritual sensibilities which Scripture calls the 'fear of the Lord.'"<sup>13</sup> In short, he added, "if a man would teach the power of religious truth, he must personally have felt the need of it."<sup>14</sup>

This same point was made by Liddon to a former student, Reginald Porter, in a letter written in 1861. In that year Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter established a theological college.

I am greatly interested [Liddon wrote to Porter] in what you tell me about the generous designs of the Bishop of Exeter for endowing his diocese with a Theological College. I hope that God may

<sup>8</sup> O. Chadwick: *The Founding of Cuddesdon* (1954), pp 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> H. P. Liddon: *Life of E. B. Pusey D.D.*, vol. I (4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1894), pp 225ff.

<sup>10</sup> O. Chadwick: *The Victorian Church*, vol. II (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1972), p382. Theological colleges were founded in Chichester, Wells and Lichfield (1857), and in Salisbury (1861).

<sup>11</sup> Liddon: *Clerical Life and Work*, p3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp 81-83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p 84.

<sup>4</sup> J. O. Johnston: *Life and Letters of Henry Parry Liddon* (1904), pp 21-26.

<sup>5</sup> G. L. Prestige: *The Life of Charles Gore* (1935), p 119.

<sup>6</sup> Reprinted posthumously in *Clerical Life and Work* (1894).

<sup>7</sup> H. P. Liddon: "The Priest in his Inner Life", in *Clerical Life and Work* (1894), p 1.



speed his endeavours: as to pretend that the universities are any longer fit places for clerical training – secularised and neologian as they are – seems the language of extreme ignorance or of bitter sarcasm. It is of course always a temptation to persons in office here [Oxford], to sacrifice the interests and efficiency of our Church to a narrow academicism: but one looks to the Bishops for larger views than to the Heads of Houses, and I am right glad that the cause of Diocesan Colleges is to be reinforced by the ripe wisdom and disinterested foresight of your respected Diocesan.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth noting that his opinion that the universities were unsuited to true theological training was in tune with that of Christopher Wordsworth, who founded one of the most distinguished of theological colleges in his cathedral city of Lincoln in 1874.<sup>16</sup>

The theological colleges, when they were founded, were not intended only to supplement the education received at Oxbridge, but chiefly to train men who were not university candidates. What did Liddon think were the essential features in such colleges which would form the priests he wished to see? In the Cuddesdon sermon I have mentioned he was clear that a theological college must have “first, a system; secondly, a spirit or atmosphere.”<sup>17</sup> On the question of system he said, “a system of instruction and study will be taken for granted; no one would endeavour to master less serious subjects than theology, by a few efforts at random. But what we require here, and chiefly, is a system of devotion, discipline, conduct, life. Not merely study, but prayer, meditation, if need be, confession, exercise, sleep, recreation, should, as far as possible, be ordered by rule.... a House which has a religious purpose should be a House of rule; it should be governed by system. Afterwards and elsewhere, the exacting demands of public work may make very little of the kind possible. Happy they who make the most of such a blessing while they may!”<sup>18</sup> System and rule were prominent ingredients of Liddon’s logical mind, not always to his advantage.

A consequence of Liddon’s plan for priestly training was that ordinands should for a time be taken out from the ordinary course of their lives and asked to live apart. “The rule”, he wrote, “is that to live in the world without being of it, still more to influence and improve it, you must have retired from it awhile...and in a Higher Presence have taken both the measure of its strength and the measure of its weakness. This is the moral object at which a theological college should especially aim.”<sup>19</sup> He defended the colleges against the possible charge of being effectively monasteries by pointing out that “in a monastery men are bound by obligations which last for a lifetime, and which differ altogether from the restraints involved in spiritual preparation for clerical work in the world.” On the other hand, theological college must not be “merely a literary society of men of blameless and retiring habits.”<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to see this ideal worked out where plans for a new theological college were concerned. It has been said that in 1861 Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter decided to establish a theological college in his cathedral city. Liddon had immediate practical concerns for the future college which he communicated to his friend Reginald Porter. Porter had graduated at Oxford before going to Cuddesdon. He was unsettled by conversions to Rome among fellow students in 1856, but he recovered his stability and was made a Deacon by the Bishop of Oxford in that year. He went as curate to Wantage, where the vicar was the outstanding priest, William John Butler; later Dean of Lincoln. Porter was ordained a priest in 1857 and subsequently became vicar of the parish of Kenn in the Exeter diocese, where he remained until his death in 1895. He became a good friend to Liddon, and the latter’s letters to him have a degree of intimacy and affection which is not found in the bulk of Liddon’s more formal correspondence. It was

<sup>15</sup> Porter, May 23, 1861. These MS letters, as yet uncatalogued, are to be found in the Liddon Papers at Pusey House.

<sup>16</sup> Chadwick: *The Victorian Church II*, p 383.

<sup>17</sup> Liddon: *Clerical Life and Work*, p 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp 85-86.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p 90.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

inevitable that Liddon should write to him about the proposed college and its aims, and his letter on the topic is the longest of his surviving letters to Porter. It was written on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1861.

I do trust [began Liddon] that, if the college is started, some obvious mistakes will be avoided.

1. As to situation. It ought to be not *in*, but *within reach of*, Exeter. The Cathedral theory would of course place it in the close. The college at Salisbury has just been opened on this plan: the Bishop was committed to it beforehand by [a] Pamphlet. But the arrangement involves a great loss. You want the retirement of the country – which aids collectedness of thought for the coming work. You want to escape for a few months from even that measure of society which is part and parcel of a cathedral atmosphere. You want greater elasticity and variety in your chapel services than a Dean and Chapter could be expected to offer. You want a great deal of work to be done in a short time – and therefore all unnecessary distractions should be avoided.<sup>21</sup>

Here we see the fruits of Liddon’s experience in Cuddesdon, with its relative countryside isolation from Oxford. His desire for freedom in the worship of the new college reflects his irritation at the outside interference in chapel services and decoration which he had known in the older college. He goes on to meet arguments which he thinks will be raised in favour of the college being adjacent to the cathedral:

It may be objected that a cathedral furnishes a Library. But a working Library would be forthcoming in a year: you remember Cuddesdon. It cannot be objected that the college should be at Exeter to be under the eye of the Bishop: as his Lordship’s health keeps him at Torquay.<sup>22</sup>

He then turns to the all-important question of the life to be lived in the college, and the system which will best facilitate the development of the college community:

2. As to system. It will I trust, be *in a Building*. The Wells plan of lodging separately is a great source of weakness.<sup>23</sup> Mr Pinder, I believe, urges that this arrangement accustoms men beforehand to a curate’s manner of life in lodgings, and prefers it on this ground to the collegiate system. But – of course – all deficiencies are glad to be provided with a theory, if they can get one; and this looks very like an *ex post facto* argument. They have no college at Wells: therefore it is better not to have one. Experience I think tells the other way. Your object is to bring young men into constant and intimate contact with those who are already ministers of Christ. The trainers and the trained *must* live together: if they meet at lecture only, you have only Oxford over again. When the Apostles were preparing for their ministry, they lived with our Lord: they did not come now and then to hear His discourses...[MS] But I should hope that on this point there would be no doubt: as economy, as well as educational efficiency is in its favour.<sup>24</sup>

Any such venture as a college inevitably involved people who would oversee its affairs, and Liddon’s previous experience made him wary of outside interference:

3. As to Government. There will, I should fear, be some risk of a committee, to whom the authorities of the college would be accountable. This committee would almost necessarily be composed of clergymen of high standing in the diocese, but not necessarily conversant with the intellectual or moral aspects of the problem of Clerical Education. Such a committee would not feel that it was doing its duty if it did not interfere from time to time. But I should augur no certain good, and much possible evil from its interference. It would be a serious drawback to the efficiency of a college, if all the important measures of its administrators were to be canvassed

<sup>21</sup> Porter letters, Liddon papers, Pusey House, May 23, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The theological college at Wells had J. H. Pinder as its first Principal. See Philip Barrett: *Barchester* (1993), p283 for details of the situation of students in Wells.

<sup>24</sup> Porter, May 23, 1861.

by a committee of gentlemen who would necessarily deal with them on a priori grounds, or on grounds of theological prejudice...[MS] Of course such a college should be in letter and spirit subject to the Bishop. This is a sufficient guarantee of its soundness or ought to be so. This must be a condition of its vitality and success. A committee of clergymen is very often after all a Presbyterian Resource – and intended to supersede Episcopal control. You do not want to put the Episcopate into commission in the Diocese of Exeter.

But I have gone on at too great length. I shall hope to hear that the plan is likely to be realised at no distant period.<sup>25</sup>

The college was indeed founded at Exeter, with C. J. Ellicott as its first Principal, and Bishop Phillpotts bequeathed a substantial amount of money to it in his will. After his death, however, interest in the college waned and the diocese of Exeter used the money to enable students to stay at Oxford for an extra year's study of theology, a scheme which cannot have commended itself to Liddon.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of what has been said, it might be thought that study was seen by Liddon as of lesser importance in theological training, but that was not his intention. In another sermon, delivered at Cuddesdon in 1868, he made clear that a theological college "has to set many of those who come to it seriously thinking on the great primary questions of life and death." Among the searching questions an ordinand must ask himself are, "What does he mean by taking orders? Why does he choose this rather than another walk of life? Has he any real purpose deeper and stronger than his ordinary resolves? Is he intending to follow a respectable profession, or has he, in his secret soul, given himself to God?"<sup>27</sup> Yet it would be curious if man so widely read in Eastern and Western theology as Liddon placed no value upon the sheer duty of *learning* in theological formation, and he does not overlook it. "An institution like Cuddesdon College," he says, "is by the very name which it bears especially devoted to teaching theology in the sense of the science of the Supreme Being." (That word "science" is to be noted. Liddon would have no sympathy with those who wish to see the work of theology as akin to poetry.) He continues,

To amass, to examine, to analyse, to exhibit in its collective force and in detail, that body of truth respecting the Being of beings, of which, through the Christian Revelation, superadded to the activities of conscience and natural observation, mankind is in possession; – this unrivalled, this sublime occupation, is the proper central intellectual work of a theological college. To that work all else is subordinate, all else is accessory, all else ministers.<sup>28</sup>

Yet his sense that merely academic theology (for want of a better expression) was no adequate foundation for priesthood led him to add a qualification. "Dogma, history, evidences, morals, language, criticism, fathers, councils, commentators, liturgiology – all are but varied means of approaching, contemplating, (dare I say it?) investigating God: all lead up to Him, or lead down from Him, or circle round Him, or at any rate base their sole claim to interest on the reality of His life."<sup>29</sup>

Yet when this has been said, it is curious that Liddon, who devoted himself to stating again and again the central doctrines of the Catholic Faith, made such rare references to the fact that those preparing for ordination should expect to do the same. Instead, he shows himself a true disciple of the Tractarians in asserting the need for recalling people to that holiness of life which should be a consequence of accepting those doctrines. Indeed, at times he can take almost an existential approach to the task of ministering to others, as when he says,

Human character in its broad, common features, and in its individual peculiarities, is well worth the closest, the severest observation; and to stimulate this observation, to train the eye in taking note of all that reveals the soul within, is an indispensable part of an adequate clerical foundation. Much, doubtless, can only be learned from [contact with others]. Much, too, may certainly be learnt from books and from the experience of those who have lived longer than we, and who hand on to us something of the accumulated wisdom of the centuries behind them. But however we may study him, man, on his ethical as well as on his mental side; man, in his strength as well as in his weakness; man, in his phases of bitterest hostility to God, as well as in his saintliest moods of conformity to God's word and will; man, at the dull stupid level of his average actions, as well as in his most exceptional and heroic efforts, is a study only less important for our purpose than is God Himself....Our ministry is not the random proclamation of a scientific discovery, involving nothing but an intellectual interest; but the careful adaptation of a Divine Remedy to the wants of a patient, whose case and symptoms we have accurately considered. To show that in Jesus Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, Interceding, given to us in Sacraments, presented by us again and again to the Father, there is grace which can more than cure all human woes; – this is the proper business of men who have, in the Evangelical sense, to speak a word in season and out of season to wearied humanity.<sup>30</sup>

That passage is a reminder to us that underneath the learning and Tractarianism of Liddon's adult life there remained strongly the Evangelical fervour of his youth.

We have seen something of the picture of priestly ministry which guided Liddon when he was striving to form men for ordination, and something of the structures which he thought would prove most effective in shaping them for that ministry. But what of their lives when they left college? He was acutely aware of the dangers they would face in daily parish work. In his 1868 sermon at Cuddesdon he remarked, "It has been said by one of the opponents of Christianity, that a clergy, left to itself, is sure to ruin itself in time, partly through its general lust of promotion, and partly through its self-indulgence."<sup>31</sup> This was a point he had made when preaching in Oxford in 1860, when he said,

Few sensible men in the present day would enter the ministry for the sake of an income. But the other sins of the Pharisees are the sins of the teaching order; they are the sins into which it most naturally falls. The love of prominence, the love of influence, the love of popularity and the praise of men, are the dangers of all priesthoods of all time.<sup>32</sup>

(It is worth commenting at this point that we may have here part of an explanation for Liddon's puzzling refusal to accept preferment other than his Canonry at St Paul's, though it should be added that he did not use it as a reason for declining advancement, even in the privacy of his diaries. In 1868 he was strongly pressed, particularly by Pusey, to take the Wardenship of the newly founded Keble College. He would not, though he agonized to the point where he actually asked Bishop Hamilton of Salisbury to decide the question for him.<sup>33</sup> He refused the Bishopric of Edinburgh in 1886, the Deanery of Worcester in the same year, and the See of St Albans in 1890.)

What, then, was to protect the clergy against their temptations? This was very much a theme in the essay I have mentioned, "The Priest in His Inner Life". His answer is that they must be constantly placing themselves before the presence of God, and recalling themselves to his service. To this end, Liddon lays the greatest stress on the importance of saying the Daily Office. As he says,

The Church of England has not left her clergy to choose for themselves absolutely and without restraint or direction, all the devotions with which they will daily approach the Throne of

<sup>25</sup> *Porter*, May 23, 1861.

<sup>26</sup> Chadwick: *The Victorian Church II*, p 390 n.4.

<sup>27</sup> Liddon: *Clerical Life and Work*, p 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* pp 54-58.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p 55.

<sup>30</sup> Liddon: *Clerical Life and Work*, p 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p 61.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p 103.

<sup>33</sup> Liddon: *Diaries* (Pusey House Archive), June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1868.



Mercy. On the contrary, "All Priests and Deacons are to say DAILY the Morning and Evening Prayer, either PRIVATELY or openly, not being let by sickness or some other urgent cause."

Now the principle that to obey is better than sacrifice seems to invest this direction with the dignity of a primary obligation for the consciences of clergymen. They are not thus enjoined to attempt any other nameable devotional exercise.<sup>34</sup>

He acknowledges the possible objection that saying these Offices will take up time which "might be spent in prayers more adapted to elicit, in the case of this man or that, a passionate and tender emotion toward the Person of our Lord and Saviour", but his characteristic response is to argue that "this will hardly counterbalance the consideration that obedience is a surer test of love than emotion, even when men seem to check the ardour and impulsiveness of love that they may win her distinguishing and primal characteristic. The Church says to her Priests, 'if ye love Me, keep My commandments.'"<sup>35</sup> He will allow no exceptions to this obligation. "The clergy are not bound to say the Daily Office only at times, when they can enjoy the privilege of joining with a congregation in saying it. They are always and everywhere bound to say it."<sup>36</sup> There follows a very Liddon-esque phrase: "The newly-ordained deacon, who finds himself in a parish where there are two Sunday Services, and an incompetent Rector, is no less bound to say the Daily Office than the stalled member of a Cathedral Chapter."<sup>37</sup>

Liddon devotes a considerable amount of space in his essay to the Daily Office, giving careful support from history for the requirement to say Morning and Evening Prayer. He also takes careful aim at those priests who too easily dispense themselves from doing so in a passage which contains some good sarcasm:

We allude to the words, "not let or hindered by sickness or any other urgent cause." Who is to say what is an "urgent cause"? or who is to say that any reason which Mr A thinks sufficiently "urgent" is not so?

Of course, in the present state of discipline, the clergyman who disregards the duty without giving it a moment's consideration is as little likely to be interfered with as he who mistakenly thinks he *has* good reasons for neglecting it.<sup>38</sup>

The reasons for Liddon's insistence on the recitation of the Office are clear enough. Firstly, he believes that it is a discipline of the Church, an obligation upon the clergy, which is being neglected. There is nothing in this requirement which should offend anyone. "Can it be said, that any, the most sensitive anti-Tractarian, could be offended by the curate's compliance with the law of the Daily Service in the privacy of his home?"<sup>39</sup> Secondly, it is important that through the recitation of the Office the priest is regularly fed on a thorough diet of scripture, and not on his preferred selections. By this means, says Liddon, the priest "is constrained, almost in self-defence, to make continual efforts to penetrate more and more thoroughly the deeper meaning of what he repeats so frequently.... This will make itself felt in his sermons and in his private ministrations."<sup>40</sup>

The third point Liddon makes concerning the Office follows from this, and that is its pastoral effectiveness. Public recitation of the Office will assist the people toward a familiarity with scripture and help their devotion, but Liddon adds a point which shows something he had learned from his own limited parochial experience, as well as by report from other clergy:

<sup>34</sup> Liddon: *Clerical Life and Work*, p 5. The quotation given is from the Rubric: Concerning the Services of the Church.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p 18.

The priest who is much among his people knows how effective is a reference to the lesson or psalm of the day, as proving to his flock that he has been with God, even though they have not followed him; and men often remark how the daily services seem to coincide, as if by a providential guidance, with the needs of their daily parochial work, and how the very psalm or the lesson for the day, suggest themselves irresistibly as the most opportune when a sinner has to be warned, or a penitent to be cheered, or a deathbed to be visited.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, but underpinning all, the Daily Office enables the priest to fulfil his greatest duty:

In saying the Daily Service, whether in Church or out of it, whether alone or with others, the Priest acts as a Priest, and makes a solemn act of intercession. In his private prayers he treats of the needs of his own soul, and its eternal prospects; in the Daily Office, self is almost, if not quite, dismissed, and he acts for others.<sup>42</sup>

I have treated the matter of the Daily Office at some length because of the central importance which Liddon gives it – a reminder in itself of how much depended for the conscientious priest upon the Office at a time when the Eucharist was unlikely to be a daily or even weekly event. And it should be added that he is not shy of commending the Lesser Hours of the Roman office as a complementary devotion. In another letter to Reginald Porter he records some reflections on the contrast between English religion and that of the Roman Church on the continent. He says,

On returning to England I enjoy the Morning and Evening Service more and the Communion Service less. The latter loses by comparison with the Mass, while the former as a popular and living service is unlike anything the Romans have.<sup>43</sup>

In the essay we are examining, he goes on to deal with the importance of Meditation in the life of the priest. Here, we are much more aware that it is a young man writing. He says, perhaps rightly, that "meditation is a duty, with which every person who is attempting to live a religious life, is supposed to be familiar," but then "the popular ideal of meditation is...as indefinite as it is general. It supposes... that the mind is exercised on a religious subject." But what is the consequence of such an understanding?

You see a worthy clergyman in his study, - he is resting his elbow on the table, and reflecting on some portions of his Bible - making remarks at intervals to his wife. This is indeed better than nothing, although it be a feeble and dreamy effort, failing in reverence, in intellectual address, in analysis, in stimulating the imagination, in challenging and coercing the will, in opening the soul in very truth to the eye of its God...It fails in these because it fails in *system*; meditation to be real MUST BE systematic.<sup>44</sup>

System again, though in fairness he does go on to say that "meditation is an act of the whole soul, rising in the fullness of its energy towards its God."<sup>45</sup> But the picture of meditation which follows - and it is a substantial part of the essay - is likely to seem a fairly dry method to most of us. However, the fact that Liddon views meditation of importance to the priest is definitely a point in his credit.

The final pages of the essay paint the ideal structure of the priest's day, and it must be said that it is likely to raise a smile when read now, as with its opening words, "Of course [the priest] will have a fixed hour for rising... We will suppose that, at latest, it is six in the summer, and seven in the winter

<sup>41</sup> *Clerical Life and Work*, p 19.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p 7.

<sup>43</sup> Porter, September 17, 1864.

<sup>44</sup> *Clerical Life and Work*, pp 22-23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p 23.

months.<sup>46</sup> There are instructions on thanking God immediately upon waking for having come through the night, upon the advisability of reciting Psalm 51 or the Te Deum while dressing, leading to half an hour's meditation and then the Morning Office. There is a purpose to this. "The great lesson which ought to be stamped indelibly on the clerical mind is the preciousness of time, - its brevity and irrevocableness, - the strict account which must be given of it, - the overwhelming interests which hang upon its due employment. Labour is the portion of the servants of God, leisure is a misery."<sup>47</sup> Yes, the Evangelical spirit was not dead in Liddon.

And so it goes on - the morning hour to be devoted to theological study, the varied works of a parish, the absolute necessity of midday prayer, and the two hours for walking and recreation, "if indeed his parish does not give him sufficient exercise."<sup>48</sup> The evening presents opportunities for system too. The priest "will dine at an early hour, with a view to declining the habits of society". (One wonders whether the mature Liddon remembered those words and wriggled, because his diaries reveal him dining out with some frequency in London and Oxford.) In any case, the priest "will make meals a matter of as little ceremony as possible, and will study simplicity in his table and household."<sup>49</sup> Early dining will make evening visiting possible, when men will be at home. Evening Prayer will be said at a fixed time, there will be more meditation and study of scripture, leading to a quarter of an hour's self-examination before sleep - but that only after the priest has said Compline with his servants - as though servants did not have enough to endure. We are reminded here that the work accomplished by men in Liddon's class was possible because they never needed to do the shopping, the cooking or the cleaning.

It is unmistakably youthful, idealistic writing, and clearly the work of a man who is unmarried. Yet its seriousness of purpose is impressive, no matter how much changing circumstances may have rendered its approach dated: and perhaps even now priests will not be harmed by this reminder of the duties, as well as the privileges, of their vocation.

This is not the place to make suggestions about the usefulness of Liddon's ideals as we consider the priesthood a hundred and fifty years later. Yet one cannot help observing that in some ways the Church of England appears at present to have slipped back quite significantly to pre-Tractarian approaches to ordination training, just as she finds herself fighting again a number of battles fought by the Victorian Church. The issues of science and religion, and also the question of fundamentalist reading of the Bible, are very much to the front of our concerns as they were serious issues for the Nineteenth Century. Residential training for ordination, which our Tractarian-influenced forebears put in place, is under steady attack, and it is disturbing how the notion has returned that a degree in academic theology - even when taught in a wholly detached and non-confessional manner, as it is in our universities when it is taught at all - should be almost an obligatory basis for priestly formation. It may be that Liddon's views are still capable of challenging contemporary assumptions about priestly ideals and what is needed to shape good priests, and that his voice should be heard again.

<sup>46</sup> *Clerical Life and Work*, p 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* pp 42-43.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p 43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

